

The Language of Ordination: The Clericalising of The Salvation Army

Booth College Association Lecture for 25 September 2008

Gordon Cotterill, an officer stationed at William Booth College in London, recently posted the following on his blog:

On the language of ordination...

It seems interesting to me that within TSA we are keen to maintain a certain line that causes frequent periodic debate when it comes to our non-sacramental stand ... I'm not sure if I have come across the same rigour of debate with similar issues. ... it is interesting that the whole emphasis of ordination of officers doesn't receive the same intensity of attention.

Recently as I watched the Commissioning of the latest session I was struck by how far our language has moved. It seems to me that the euphemistic use of ordination to explain commissioning has made quite some journey where now a given Territorial Commander declares to each cadet "I commission and ordain you..." (or words to that effect). It seems interesting to me that a choice of language to protect the kudos of officership with our ecclesiastical cousins has become so mainstream as to now even infer a supposed 'higher calling' of officership.

But no debate, no walk outs, no resignations, no battle lines, no edicts from International Headquarters, no articles, no letters looking at such an impact on SA views on the 'priesthood of all believers'. Nothing to question the language of ordination as it, like a cuckoo, surreptitiously kicks out the centrality of dedication. ...

So why the lack of debate in one area and intensity in another?¹

Still, I was encouraged that when Gordon Cotterill borrowed my book on *Leadership in the Salvation Army* from his College library, he said it appeared well-read and fell open automatically to the chapter on Ordination. So please bear with me. I'm grateful to the Booth College Association for the opportunity to trot out my old war horse – like Job's, it may smell battle from afar and say "Ha, ha!"

Clericalism, according to Webster, is "A policy of maintaining or increasing the power of a religious hierarchy". Clericalisation is the process by which that happens. The Salvation Army's adoption of the language of ordination was just one milestone in a clericalising journey as long as its history. What I shall attempt to do now is to place the Salvation Army's story in this context, by describing, firstly, clericalisation as a sociological phenomenon, and secondly, how it has affected the Salvation Army.

Clericalisation is a sociological, historical phenomenon.

Clericalisation is simply religious specialisation. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, "Every profession is a conspiracy against the laity". Those in the know, plumbers and IT specialists alike, have superseded theologians in having the rest of us over a barrel. They can give us hell today rather than threatening it in the hereafter. That's specialisation. It's about the use of power.

Robert Michels suggested five factors leading to centralisation of power in organisations.² These are (1) the felt inadequacy of ordinary members, leading to limited participation and apathy; (2) the experience of leadership enhancing leaders' knowledge, expertise and indispensability; (3) the tendency of leaders to use their power to retain rewards of office; (4) the tendency of organizations to become co-dependent with leadership, providing resources for their continued monopoly of power; (5) the way in which tenure of leadership establishes a customary

¹ Gordon Cotterill www.urbanarmy.blogspot.com July 14, 2008.

² Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (New York: Colliers, [1911] 1962).

right to office. These factors constituted an “iron law of oligarchy”. Michels was writing about politics but it’s a transferable concept. In religious groups we call it clericalisation.

Various writers have shone different lights on the process:

- Role theory suggests how clergy come to be seen and to see themselves as a caste distinct from laity. Theodore Sarbin says the roles people play and narratives they tell serve to construct their sense of identity.³ Thornton and Nardi write that “the role is internalised and assimilated so that in a sense the person and the role become inseparable.”⁴ (“I don’t know who I am if I’m not the Corps Officer.”)
- Thomas O’Dea talked about “mixed motivation” as key to the clericalising process. Leadership in its earliest stages is characterised by single-mindedness but later for other motivations creep in – the desire for prestige or power, need for security within a professional structure.⁵ This bureaucracy comes to impose its agenda, not always identical or even compatible with founding vision, on its religious community as whole.⁶
- Andrew Abbott sees clericalism as an example of professionalisation, a profession defending its jurisdiction in a permanent state of turf war with the laity. Professions claim sole possession and control over training, qualifications and skills required for the exercise of their role. What began as a functional role seeks to establish a claim to spiritually legitimated status.⁷
- David Horrell says that clericalisation can be seen as struggle for power, associated with social conservatism, even in the early church. The “household code” material in the Pastoral Epistles and other sub-apostolic writings reveals an early shift from itinerant to local leadership. This legitimated the role of local male leadership in the house church structure.⁸ There’s a quantum leap from “the church at Chloe’s place” to “a bishop must be the husband of one wife”.
- Richard Schoenherr says that all religions have two opposite things going on. One derives from need for authoritative structures to safeguard the original vision, and leads to elaboration of priestly hierarchies. The other emphasises the individual’s personal relationship God so that mediating role of structures is questioned.⁹ We can see both those tendencies in the Army and the tension between them casts a helpful light on our history.

In sum: new movements tend to be egalitarian because most adherents are likely to be involved in the mission. As the movement matures and enters its second and third generations, there are usually more nominal members and fewer activists, whose energies are increasingly committed to maintenance and preservation of structures as well as, or even rather than, mission. Clericalisation is a by-product of institutionalisation; organisations clericalise as they institutionalise. The life-cycles of organisations follow a wave-like swell from movement to

³ See for example: Theodore Sarbin and Vernon L. Allen, “Role Theory” in Gardner Lindsey and Elliot Aronson (eds), *The Handbook of Social Psychology* 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley 1968); Theodore Sarbin (ed.), *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (London: Praeger 1986).

⁴ Russell Thornton and Peter N. Nardi, “The Dynamics of Role Acquisition”, *American Journal of Sociology* 80 (1975) pp. 870-85.

⁵ Thomas O’Dea, “Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalisation of Religion”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1:1 (October 1961) p. 33.

⁶ Thomas O’Dea, *Sociology and the Study of Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1970) p. 245.

⁷ Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) pp. 35-7.

⁸ David Horrell, “Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity”, *Sociology of Religion* 58:4 (Winter 1997) pp. 323-41.

⁹ Richard A. Schoenherr, “Power and Authority in Organised Religion: Disaggregating the Phenomenological Core”, *Sociological Analysis* 47: S (March 1987) pp. 52-71.

monument. They also tend to run out of puff, plateau, and decline – they may or may not recover. Often, with onset of decline, some renewal movement strikes out upon a new trajectory of growth before eventually repeating the same pattern.

The early church was egalitarian. It had leaders but no priests. As it institutionalised over its first few centuries, it accommodated to traditional religious expectations, to hierarchical society and the Roman state.¹⁰ Eventually the hierarchical papacy replaced the hierarchical empire. It took on characteristics incompatible with its founding vision of free and equal citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven (like the old Israel's nation of kings and priests). That vision nevertheless remained, in David Martin's terms, "a store of explosive materials capable of fissionable contact with social fragmentation" so that "schism is inevitable and rooted in the nature of Christianity itself as well as in the nature of society."¹¹ Thus renewal in the Church often coincides with ferment or major disruption in society as whole, or dissatisfaction of marginalised groups. (Both the Christian Mission and the 614 movement started in the slums.) In the Catholic Church, some renewal movements became "orders" while others remained on the heretical fringes. In Protestantism, itself such a movement in origin, sectarian groups have flourished.

Nearly all sectarian movements from and including the early church on – monasticism, the mendicant orders of friars, the Waldensians, the reformation churches and sects, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, have begun as "lay" movements, acknowledging little distinction of status between leaders and led, and nearly all have ended up controlled by priestly hierarchies, whether so called or not. The more institutionalised the body becomes, the greater degree of clericalisation. Thus the waves of renewal are in their turn absorbed and new orthodoxies and hegemonies become established.

Bryan Wilson sums up:

What does appear is that the dissenting movements of Protestantism, which were lay movements, or movements which gave greater place to laymen than the traditional churches had ever conceded, pass, over the course of time, under the control of full-time religious specialists... Over time, movements which rebel against religious specialization, against clerical privilege and control, gradually come again under the control of a clerical class... Professionalism is a part of the wider social process of secular society, and so even in anti-clerical movements professionals re-emerge. Their real power, when they do re-emerge, however, is in their administrative control and the fact of their full-time involvement, and not in their liturgical functions, although these will be regarded as the activity for which their authority is legitimated.¹²

Adherents of religions usually claim some "spiritual" rationale for their human behaviour. In the church there is a tradition that ordination indelibly and irreversibly changes a person's essential, ontological character, just as baptism is believed to do. The second Vatican council stood in a tradition stretching back to Augustine of Hippo when it asserted that

The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood... differ essentially and not only in degree.¹³

Others deny that. Emil Brunner says that

All minister, and nowhere is to be perceived a separation or even merely a distinction between those who do and those who do not minister... There exists in the Ecclesia a universal duty and right of

¹⁰ A comprehensive account of the process is found in Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers: Developments from the General to the Special Priesthood in Christian Literature in the First Three Centuries* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

¹¹ David Martin, *Reflections on Sociology and Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1997) pp. 42-3.

¹² Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966) p. 136.

¹³ "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Article 10" in Austin Flannery (Ed.) *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville Min: Liturgical Press, 1975) p. 361.

service, a universal readiness to serve and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions.¹⁴

Nevertheless, whether we hold that clergy are essentially different from lesser mortals or we claim to believe in equality, the end result is often the same. Miroslav Volf notes that even in the contemporary unstructured house church movement:

“A strongly hierarchical, informal system of paternal relations often develops between the congregation and the charismatic delegates from the ascended Christ.”¹⁵

Whether in the Exclusive Brethren or the “Shepherding” movement, you know who the boss is. Having clerics does not necessarily involve clericalism. Not having clerics does not necessarily mean clericalism can be avoided. Office itself, formal or informal, inevitably confers power and power offers at least possibility of those who exercise it “tyrannising over those allotted to [their] care”.¹⁶ Power, like steroids taken by an athlete, may enhance performance but exact a long-term cost.

In Walter Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination*, the alternative, prophetic community of Moses is contrasted with the “royal consciousness” of Egyptian Empire. Within 250 years of the Exodus from Egypt, the establishment of Solomon’s Empire represented the rejection of that free association of Israelites and a return to structures of oppression.¹⁷ In the same way, the process of institutionalisation and clericalisation in the church can be seen as a successful reconquest of the new community by the old structures of domination and power. These may in turn subverted in due course by renewed egalitarianism.

Any human society needs some form of order to avoid falling into either anarchy or tyranny. A society called into being around some founding vision requires some means of maintaining what in the church is called “apostolicity” – authenticity derived from faithfulness to a founding vision. The danger with leadership, however, is that rather than being merely a means of maintaining authenticity, it can come to identify itself as central to it, the means becoming the end. That is clericalisation.

My argument is that the Salvation Army’s own development conforms to this general outline; I invite you to look at our history through this lens.

Clericalisation and the Salvation Army

It’s a commonplace that Booth did not intend to form a Church/sect/denomination. “From the first, I was strongly opposed to forming any separate organisation...”¹⁸ As late as 1950s, General Albert Orsborn still denied emphatically that Salvation Army was a “church”, preferring “a permanent mission to the unconverted”.¹⁹ But if Salvation Army was not a “church”, were officers “ministers”? At first no one cared; only later it became an issue.

The Salvation Army inherited Methodism’s ambiguity about ministry – its officers were “lay”, but like Wesley’s lay-preachers they increasingly adopted clerical roles and identity. The Clerical class is associated with specific functions – administration of sacraments, pastoring, preaching/teaching (magisterial office) and government. Officers did these things. In practice they became “clergy”. With the appointment of Divisional Officers from 1880, and then Territorial Commanders, the Army had a quasi-Episcopal structure as well as a quasi-military persona.

¹⁴ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1953) p. 50.

¹⁵ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998) p. 237.

¹⁶ 1 Peter 5:3.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn 2001) p. 23.

¹⁸ Introduction to George Scott Railton’s *Twenty-one Years Salvation Army* (London: SA, 1886) p. 22.

¹⁹ *The Officer* (March-April 1954) p. 74.

The Founders maintained an ambivalence about clericalism, as they did about being a church. Its origins and theology meant that the Army has championed the concept of priesthood of all believers and rejected clerical status. At same time it has claimed ministerial equivalency for officers.

On the one hand, William Booth wrote:

I have lived, thank God, to witness the separation between layman and cleric become more and more obscured, and to see Jesus Christ's idea of changing in a moment ignorant fishermen into fishers of men nearer and nearer realization.²⁰

[There is]...no "exclusive order of preachers" nor ministry confined to a particular class of individuals who constitute a sacred order specially raised up and qualified... on the ground of their ancestors having been specially set apart for it, and authorised to communicate the same power to their successors, who are, they again contend, empowered to pass on some special virtues to those who listen to their teaching... I deny the existence of any order exclusively possessing the right to publish the salvation of God... I honour the Order of Preachers; I belong to it myself... but as to his possessing any particular grace because of his having gone through any form of Ordination, or any other ceremonial whatever, I think that idea is a great mistake.

And I want to say here, once and for all, that no such notion is taught in any authorised statement of Salvation Army doctrine or affirmed by any responsible officer in the organisation... As Soldiers of Christ, the same duty places us all on one level.²¹

Not only were officers *not* "clergy" but soldiers in effect *were*. Booth in 1898 hoped that soldiers would not shirk their duty "by any talk of not being an officer."

You cannot say you are not ordained. You were ordained when you signed Articles of War, under the blessed Flag. If not, I ordain every man, woman and child here present that has received the new life. I ordain you now. I cannot get at you to lay my hands upon you. I ordain you with the breath of my mouth. I tell you what your true business in the world is, and in the name of the living God I authorise you to go and do it. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature!²²

But at the same time as such statements that Salvation Army was a *lay* movement, we find a growing emphasis on the distinctive role – or indeed status – of officers. Booth wrote in 1900:

Indeed, the fact is ever before us – like Priest, like People; like Captain, like Corps.²³

And in 1903:

More and more as I have wrestled with the [new] regulations this week, it has been borne in upon me that it is the Officer upon whom all depends. It has always been so. If Moses had not made a priesthood, there would have been no Jewish nation. It was the priesthood of the Levites which kept them *alive*, saved them from their inherent rottenness... and perpetuated the law which made them.²⁴

The fact is that Booth's own views changing. St. John Ervine comments:

This was a far different note from any that he had hitherto sounded. Priests had never previously been much esteemed by him who was more ready to admire prophets than priests... The Soldier-Prophet was about to leave his command to a Lawyer-Priest. A younger William Booth would have known

²⁰ George Scott Railton, *General Booth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912) p. 17.

²¹ William Booth in *The Officer* (June 1899) pp. 202-3.

²² *The War Cry* (22 January 1898) p. 9, col. 3.

²³ William Booth, *Letter to Commissioners and Territorial Commanders* (London: Salvation Army, 1900) p. 15.

²⁴ Harold Begbie, *Life of William Booth* (London: Macmillan, 1920) II, p. 306.

that this was dangerous, but Booth was old and solitary and tired, and old men want priests more than they want warriors.”²⁵

Roland Robertson attributes this change to Booth’s anticipation of a possible leadership crisis after his death. “Further, he came to the conclusion that the priesthood of all believers, although already effectively dropped in practice, had to be attenuated as an ideal.”²⁶

Bramwell Booth wrote in 1925:

In this, we humbly but firmly claim that we are in no way inferior, either to the saints who have gone before, or – though remaining separate from them, even as one branch in the vine is separate from another – to the saints of the present. We, no less than they, are called and chosen to sanctification of the Spirit and to the inheritance of eternal life. And our officers are, equally with them, ministers in the church of God...²⁷

So, there was ambiguity over the status of officers, partly inherited from Methodist theological roots and partly because traditional church distinctions were of little interest or relevance to Salvationists. The Army, attempting to maintain a sectarian equality of believers, resisted the idea that its officers were clergy.

At same time, partly because of the autocratic temperament of Founder, it adopted a military, hierarchical structure which expedited the process of clericalisation. Conditions of officers’ service would constitute their professional milieu in way that not true of non-officer, volunteer Salvationists. The mystique of the Call to officership, the spiritually intensive nature of officer-formation in training and sessional group bonding, the extent of personal commitment involved in the Covenant and Undertakings, the ranking system, the appointment system, the distinctive functions/roles of officers and the intensity of all-absorbing work, together with a sense of corporate identity and *esprit de corps*, gave officership a character which was clerical compared with that of rank and file.

Salvationists were unique; they didn’t need to dress up in anyone else’s vestments. Rather than taking historic pattern of church as model they fought against it as repugnant to their view of ministerial role of Christians in general. But they could not avoid bringing with them from their church background ways of thinking about how the church should function. Pragmatic decisions beget principles – do whatever seems best at the time and you can end up with a straightjacket of precedents. They ended up with a similar model of clergy and laity and an episcopal system of government under different names. Within a few years it was difficult *in practice*, leaving aside distinctions of legitimacy and apostolic provenance, to distinguish officership from clerical status in any other church. And this development coincided with the institutionalisation of the Movement.

Sociologists refer to a period of “routinisation”, during which initially radical sectarian movements accommodate to world around them, and “denominationalise”. Robertson considered that The Salvation Army had resisted this process and therefore dubbed it an “established sect”.²⁸ But the Army in the western world has conformed to type in this respect. Features of this transition are:

- “Redemption and lift” (the miracle of the changing of beer into furniture, and then the gentrifying of later generations).
- A change in mindset from “mission to maintenance”.
- The softening of the Army’s opposition to “the world”.

25 St. John Ervine, *God's Soldier, General William Booth* (London, Heinemann, 1934) II, pp.777-8.

26 Roland Robertson, “The Salvation Army”, in Bryan Wilson, *Patterns of Sectarianism* (London, Heinemann, 1967) p. 80.

27 W. Bramwell Booth, *Echoes and Memories* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, [1925] 2nd edn. 1977) p. 82.

28 Roland Robertson, in *Patterns of Sectarianism*, pp. 49-105.

- The Army ceased to be the all-embracing social world of Salvationists.

The end result: the Army became another “mainline” denomination, its officers were regarded, and regarded themselves, as clergy, and the soldiers thought of themselves as laity. Despite a strong tradition of soldier-participation, officers became a professional religious class.

Thomas O’Dea wrote:

there comes into existence a body of men for whom the clerical life offers not simply the “religious” satisfactions of the earlier charismatic period, but also prestige and respectability, power and influence... and satisfactions derived from the use of personal talents in teaching, leadership, etc. Moreover, the *maintenance* of the situation in which these rewards are forthcoming tends to become an element in the motivation of the group.²⁹

The Army inherited and carried forward the ecclesiological contradictions of Methodism (and of every other sect). It has recapitulated, in its brief life, the history of the church as a whole.

This denominationalising tendency consolidated throughout the 20th century, even though the Army’s official rhetoric long remained sectarian, for example, in its distinctive language and its social conservatism. The usual pattern of such movements in their life-cycle is that a period of consolidation and reflection ensues in its second century. The Movement becomes more self-conscious; it begins to clarify and rationalise, adjusting to operating in different world from that of its origins. So there came about a debate, in two phases:

- From the 1960s, a debate over whether officership was simply a functional role or enjoyed a higher status.
- From the 1980s, a debate over “ordination”.

The same ambiguity or polarisation became apparent in this debate as we have seen in the writings of the Founders. We came down firmly on both sides of the argument. Sample some views:

Commissioner Hubert Scotney:

The distinction made today between clergy and laity does not exist in the New Testament... The terms layman and laity (in the current usage of those words) are completely out of character in a Salvation Army context... It is foreign to the entire concept of Salvationism to imagine two levels of involvement. Any distinction between officers and soldiers is one of function rather than status.³⁰

Against that, Colonel William Clark (IHQ):

a direct call from God into the ranks of Salvation Army officership, we have been given particular spiritual authority... Whatever our role ...happens to be for the time being... we are primarily spiritual leaders... Our spiritual authority lies not only or chiefly in what we do, but in what we are... Our calling is to be a certain kind of person and not ... to do a certain kind of job... The “ordained” ministry of the Church – to which body we belong by virtue of our calling, response, training and commissioning – is a distinctive ministry within the body of the whole people of God, different from that “general” ministry of the Church which is defined in the New Testament as “the priesthood of all believers”.³¹

In 1978 General Arnold Brown introduced “ordain” into commissioning, eventually provoking a new round of discussion.

Captain Chick Yuill, 1985:

29 T.F. O’Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1966) p. 91.

30 *Officer* (July 1969) p. 452.

31 *Officer* (July 1976) pp. 289-90.

May I suggest that we need to re-emphasise the truth that there is no real distinction between officers and soldiers, that the difference is simply of function... If that little word 'ordain' has crept in because of a subconscious desire that other Christians should realise that we are as 'important' as the clergy of other denominations, ... in the end it matters not a jot where we stand in the estimation of any who would compile a league table of ecclesiastical importance.³²

Against that, try Brigadier Bramwell Darbyshire (R):

In spite of all the stuff about the priesthood of all believers, ordained and commissioned officers are different from non-officer Salvationists. They are not cleverer, wiser, more loved of God than their fellows, but they are special, set apart for Jesus in a way that involves sacrifice and often great inconvenience to their families... No one is more grateful for the Army's dedicated lay staff than this old warrior; but let's get it right. They may be as much involved as officers, but there is for an officer a sacramental dimension and if we lose sight of this the Army is finished.³³

Or Lt. Colonel Evelyn Haggett: basing her argument on God's gift of priesthood to Aaron (Numbers 18:7), she saw officership as a "gift of ordination to a sacramental life..."; she found it "awesome to be called by God to the priesthood." Officers, she claimed, were "of the cloth" like clergy and priests.³⁴

There was a whole range of views between these extremes. Some rejected a spurious status equivalent to priestly character for officership, but felt a simply functional description could not justify a separate officer role. They therefore looked for an internal, Salvation Army validation, a combination of an officer's own personal sense of calling and the objective fact that Salvation Army officer ministry was an existing reality.

Major Cecil Waters:

We will go on looking for a definition of officership unless and until we recognise that officership exists firstly as a convenience by which we organise the Army and secondly as one function, among many, to which we feel "called of God. [It is] impossible to define a concept of officership which is plainly and clearly distinct from that of soldiership. [He concluded] (a) That it would seem that the Army needs full time workers... Most, but by no means all, these workers are officers. (b) That we believe we may be called to be such workers – and this call may refer to officership (rather than employee or envoy status). (c) That to be so called and so engaged is sufficient to sustain our work, our spirit and our identity. I believe we need look for nothing more special than this."³⁵

So ran the debate amongst Salvationists; but there were also **Official Words**:

- **Ordination**

The first official statement on this matter was General Brown's introduction of "ordination" in commissioning. The Chief of Staff's 1978 letter to Territorial Commanders stated:

It is the General's wish that a slight modification should be made to the wording of the Dedication Service during the Commissioning of cadets, in order to emphasise the fact that Salvation Army officers are ordained ministers of Christ and of His Gospel.

³² *Officer* (October 1985) pp. 438-40.

³³ *Salvationist* (18 April 1998) p. 6.

³⁴ *Officer* (January-February 2006) p. 23.

³⁵ *Officer* (July 1992) p. 317.

After the cadets have made their Affirmation of Faith, the officer conducting the Commissioning should then say: “In accepting these pledges which you each have made, I commission you as officers of The Salvation Army and ordain you as ministers of His Gospel.”³⁶

This decision did not command universal support: it was reviewed in 1988 and 1992, and in 2002 it was amended by General John Gowans to read:

The commissioning officer will say to each cadet in turn: “Cadet (name): Accepting your promises and recognising that God has called, ordained and empowered you to be a minister of Christ and of his gospel, I commission you an officer of The Salvation Army.”³⁷

Apart from the individual rather than collective commissioning of cadets, the significant change was that “ordination” was seen as something already done by God rather than in this ceremony by a representative of organisation. As you will know, the present General disagreed with this change, and has now reversed it.

- Response to the **Lima** Document

The 1982 World Council of Churches *Faith and Order Paper 111 on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Lima) was circulated amongst churches for comment. In its response, the Army identified with Lima where could; its main concern was to defend its non-sacramental stance.³⁸

On the question of how Salvation Army ministry was perceived in relation to traditional Church belief about ordination, the Army missed significant areas of difference. It was vague about meaning of language of ordination, which it had recently adopted, and confused the concept of indelible character of orders with Army’s own expectation that officers had life-long ministry. It identified with the theology of “radical reformation” but also sought to be included in the fold of “mainstream” ecclesiology by claiming to be just like everyone else but with different terminology. Or in the use of “ordination”, the *same* terminology.

At same time as the Army dismissing as irrelevant the theological fine print on matters of faith and order, it adopted a form of words, “ordination”, which did not belong to its own tradition. It interpreted this term in a sense unacceptable to the mainstream of tradition which held apostolic succession to be important – possibly because its own ecclesiology was not thought through.

- **Community in Mission**

Philip Needham’s *Community in Mission, A Salvationist Ecclesiology* was published 1987. Needham’s basic premise: “a Salvationist ecclesiology stands as a reminder to the Church that its mission in the world is primary, and that the life of the Church ought largely to be shaped by a basic commitment to mission.”³⁹ His ecclesiology deals with ministry of Army as a whole, and only by the way with that of the officer corps in particular.

Needham clearly confined the concept of “ordination” to a “functional” role within the movement – he claimed its significance was best expressed in word “commissioning”, used of both officers and soldiers taking up specific tasks, while “ordination” was commonly used in connection with “ministries that require theological training, specialised skills, pastoral

³⁶ Letters in IHQ Archives.

³⁷ IHQ Archives.

³⁸ Its response was included in *Faith and Order Paper 137* of 1987, and also published by Army as *One Faith, One Church*, in 1990.

³⁹ Philip Needham, *Community in Mission* (London: Salvation Army, 1987) pp. 4-5

leadership and a full-time vocation the ordained ministry can only be understood as functional...⁴⁰

- The work of the **International Doctrine Council**

The 1998 edition of the *Handbook of Doctrine, Salvation Story*, explains the evolution of our Movement from an agency for evangelism to a denominational church.

On Ministry, it explains that all Christians are “ministers or servants of the gospel... share in the priestly ministry... In that sense there is no separated ministry.” However:

Within that common calling, some are called by Christ to be full-time office-holders within the Church. Their calling is affirmed by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the recognition of the Christian community and their commissioning – ordination – for service. Their function is to focus the mission and ministry of the whole Church so that its members are held faithful to their calling.

They serve their fellow ministers as visionaries who point the way to mission, as pastors who minister to the priests when they are hurt or overcome, as enablers who equip others for mission, as spiritual leaders.⁴¹

Like *Community in Mission, Salvation Story* makes clear the principle that ministry of particular persons arises out of ministry of whole Christian community, and attempts to explain and justify how this happens in practice.

The Council’s work *Servants Together* was prepared because of the 1995 International Council of Leaders’ recommendation that:

The roles of officers and soldiers be defined and a theology of “the priesthood of all believers” be developed to encourage greater involvement in ministry (for example, spiritual leadership, leadership in general), worship, service and evangelism.⁴²

This book clearly stated that there is no distinction in status between soldiers and officers, although it then struggled to establish what is unique about the officer role, admitting that a variety of opinion is held on the subject. As an official response to the debate of the previous forty years, *Servants Together* entrenched the Army’s traditional ambiguity about its “separated ministry” – although the 2008 edition, with its inclusion of the new *Minute* on Commissioning amongst other things, takes us in a clericalising direction.

Nevertheless, we may still sum up the progression after the introduction of ordination in 1978 at least to *Servants Together* in 2002, by saying that in 1970s the pendulum had swung far in direction of status for officers, while subsequent works tried to correct the imbalance and restore a functional view – while retaining Movement’s traditional ambiguity about question.

There are **officers who may not be officers.**

We have Salvationists who perform “officer” functions without officer status. These may include non-commissioned and warranted ranks – Envoys, Auxiliary Captains, Lieutenants between 2001 and 2008 – and also soldiers. The ambiguity about the status of officers – whether they are clerical or lay – has implications for them too. (Also, surprisingly, women officers, particularly married women. I have three chapters on women in my book: I cannot even begin to comment in the space of this lecture!) To have people doing identical work, under similar conditions, but

40 Needham, *Community*, p. 65.

41 *Salvation Story* (London: Salvation Army, 1998) p. 108.

42 *Servants Together* (London: Salvation Army, 2002) p. 127

accorded differing status and privileges is unfair and illogical and runs counter to the principle that officership is simply functional. It means that people are being treated differently because of what they *are* rather than what they *do*. That implies a priesthood of those essentially different.

The late twentieth century saw more soldiers in ministry roles – as youth workers, pastoral workers, corps leaders, social workers and administrators – particularly in western countries with declining officer strength. Debate about the respective roles and status of officers and soldiers has paralleled similar controversy in the Roman Catholic church.⁴³ The difference between Church and Salvation Army lies in fact that Army does not in theory reserve spiritual ministry and leadership roles for sacerdotal class. The similarity is that in practice, because of its hierarchical structure, the Army behaves in the same way as Church, so change in this area occasions similar tensions.

Against the tendency for officers to become clergy and soldiers to think of themselves as laity, there has always been counter-movement, a consistent tradition of soldier initiative and participation in Army's work. There is always some tension between the belief that soldiers are the front line of evangelism, in *real* "full-time service", to be resourced by officers rather than used; and the assumption that soldiers are "cannon-fodder", whose lives are co-extensive with Army programmes. The second approach is always a danger in a clericalising context.

In the "Western world" Army, the second half of twentieth century saw attempts to introduce consultative machinery on both the local level, with Corps Councils, and the territorial level, with a variety of "laymen's advisory" groups.

Three weaknesses may be discerned in attempts to spread the ownership of the Army.

1. Firstly, as Peter Price has observed of Catholic Church: "The consultative structures of the Church are still only 'recommended' and 'advisory'. They do not necessarily facilitate Lay participation in real decision-making. Such participation as well as its authority are dependent on the individual Bishop or Parish Priest, and may be dismantled at will."⁴⁴
2. Secondly, the default, officer-centred position into which organisation readily lapses, attributing omnicompetence to commissioned rank, means that too often business decisions are made by commercial amateurs, with commensurate loss of credibility in eyes of soldiers.
3. Thirdly, conversely, there is a danger that people see the professional business of the church as the "real" work of Christians, instead of their being light and salt in the world. This also "clericalises" the "laity".

- **The International Commission on Officership**

This was set up by General Rader on the recommendation of the 1998 International Conference of Leaders "to review all aspects of the concept of officership in the light of the contemporary situation and its challenges, with a view to introducing a greater measure of flexibility" into officer service.⁴⁵

Concerning the status of officership, the Commission was asked to do two incompatible things: to strengthen ideal of life-time service and to explore possibilities of short-term service. The first would shore up the "clerical" assumptions behind officership; the second would permit a greater degree of flexibility based on an "all-lay" ethos. The Commission offered both alternatives. General Gowans tried to have it both ways but ended up perpetuating the two-tier

43 Mary Ann Glendon, "The Hour of the Laity", *First Things*, 127 (November 2002) pp. 23-9. Downloaded 25 May 2004 from (<http://print.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0211/articles/glendon.html>).

44 Peter Price, "Vatican II: End of a Clerical Church (1)" in *Australian Ejournal of Theology* (http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aet_1Price.htm) Downloaded 23 February 2004.

45 Norman Howe, "The International Commission on Officership, A Report", *Officer* (August 1999) p. 19.

model, with two groups performing the same ministry roles but only one having the status of officership. Lieutenants were not officers. (Of course, “As you were!” is now the Order of the Day.)

Salvation Army had three options regarding clerical status:

1. There *are* priests/clerics/people in orders in Church, with status distinct from laity, but we *do not* have them in Salvation Army.

That would mean the Army’s acceptance of an “all lay” status for soldiers and officers and a second class clergy status for officers. The Army would be something like an “order” rather than a stand-alone entity like a “church” or “denomination”.

2. There *are* priests/clerics/people in orders in Church, and we *do* have them as officers in Salvation Army.

This is what General Brown claimed by adopting “ordination”, and assuming that the Army’s commissioning was always equivalent to ordination. It endorsed officially what Salvationists already assumed. Confusion on this issue within the Army is partly the result of the ambiguity about church order inherited from Methodism, and partly the desire to be accepted by other Christian denominations as one of them. *But* that’s a position difficult to hold without sliding into clericalism.

3. There are *no* priests/clerics/orders in Church, and Salvation Army does *not* aspire to any. All Christians are “lay”, all belong to the people of God, without distinction of status.

This was Booth’s theoretical position; his theology required it. However, the Army’s ecclesiology was shaped instead by his autocratic temperament, the need for organisation, the twin demons of militarism and bureaucracy, the susceptibility of human nature to pride and ambition, and historically conditioned expectations. So the Salvation Army became “clericalised”. The difficulty lies in the tension between the hierarchical institutional structure and the “Priesthood of all Believers” ethos inherited from our radical Protestant antecedents.

Why is clericalisation a problem?

Clericalisation has had two related adverse effects on the Church - and on the Salvation Army.

1. Clericalism fosters a spirit incompatible with “servanthood” Jesus modelled and taught; it undermines the kind of community Jesus calls together.
2. By concentrating power and influence in the hands of minority, clericalisation disempowers majority of members of Church. It can therefore diminish the Church’s effectiveness in mission.

Of the first adverse effect, you could supply your own examples, but if it’s any help, Bramwell Booth was aware of the danger long back. In 1894 he was complaining that “the D.O.’s [Divisional Officers] are often much more separate from their F.O.’s than they ought to be. Class and caste grows with the growth of the military idea. Needs watching.”⁴⁶ Thirty years later he was still anxious about Divisional and Territorial leaders in that “they are open to special dangers in that they rise and grow powerful and sink into a kind of opulence...”⁴⁷ (Unhappily, Captains are just as prone to this as Colonels.) William Booth himself, addressing staff officers in Conference in 1907, spoke of the difficulties some officers had with promotion – “because their promotion is

⁴⁶ W. Bramwell Booth, letter of October 1894, in Catherine Bramwell Booth, *Bramwell Booth* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1932) p. 218.

⁴⁷ W. Bramwell Booth, letter to his wife, 27 April 1924, in Catherine Bramwell Booth, *Bramwell Booth*, p. 437.

not as rapid as they think it should be, or as they think the promotion of other officers is... That is sometimes baldly styled ambition, and when that ambition is based on selfishness it is a very ruinous quality.”⁴⁸

General Albert Orsborn acknowledged to the 1949 Commissioners’ Conference that

dissatisfaction and decline... is blamed on our system of ranks, promotions, positions and differing salaries and retirements... that it has created envy and kindred evils and developed sycophancy, ingratiating, “wire-pulling”, favouritism, etc... It is a sad reflection that we are in character, in spirituality, unable to meet the strain of our own system.⁴⁹

All of which is to say that it is in the nature of systems to get in the way of the reason they exist. If the doctrine of holiness is not lived as well as talked about, human nature will take its course, and a system which actually encourages it to do so requires extra vigilance.

And the second adverse effect, the disempowerment of the many by the exaltation of the few? The American Nazarene sociologist Kenneth E. Crow sums up: “Loyalty declines when ability to influence decision and policies declines. When institutionalization results in top-down management, one of the consequences is member apathy and withdrawal.”⁵⁰ I do offer some statistical support for this proposition in my book, but here it may be simpler to quote the words of Sir Christopher Wren’s memorial in St Paul’s cathedral: “If you would see his monument, look about you.” That is, what have our Territorial statistics been telling us?

It would be difficult to say whether clericalisation had led to a loss of zeal, or loss of zeal had been compensated for by a growing preoccupation with status, or whether each process fed the other. There is a paradox here: the military system, quite apart from the fact that it fitted Booth’s autocratic temperament, was designed for rapid response, and is still officially justified in those terms. The Army’s first period of rapid growth followed its introduction. It caught the imagination for a time. However the burgeoning of hierarchical and bureaucratic attitudes came to exert a counter-influence. The reason for success contained the seeds of failure. The longer-term effects of autocracy and “sectarian totalitarianism” were to lose the loyalty of many of those hitherto enthusiastic, and to deter subsequent generations, more habituated to free thought and democracy, from joining.

Clearly I’m talking about what we may loosely call the “Western” Army. In Africa and India the Army is both expanding rapidly *and* also extremely rank-conscious! The cultures are different. I do not believe that in *our* culture, our salvation lies in the hair of the dog that bit us. You may conclude that this may all be true in a theoretical way but have no real importance? Unfortunately clericalism is to clergy as water to fish. It’s so pervasive we don’t recognise it, but as a soldier working on THQ said to me, “It’s in our faces all the time!”

What, if anything, can be done?

If clericalisation is a bad thing in our culture, how may its ill-effects be moderated?

Leadership is indispensable to the effectiveness of any movement; it’s a given. Structure is necessary; it will happen anyway, and it needs continuity, accountability and legitimacy to mitigate the effects of unrestrained personal power. But if institutionalisation is inevitable, the prophetic critique, the Reformation’s *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church always reforming itself), is equally necessary.

There are two ways the problem can be approached: one is structural, the other attitudinal.

The 2002 edition of *Servants Together* made the following suggestions for structural change:

⁴⁸ William Booth, *Addresses to Staff Officers* (London: SA, 1907) pp. 24-5.

⁴⁹ General Eric Wickberg, “Movements for Reform” (Address at the 1971 International Conference of Leaders, Minutes) p. 9.

⁵⁰ Kenneth E. Crow, “The Church of the Nazarene and O’Dea’s Dilemma of Mixed Motivation”

(www.nazarene.org/ansr/articles/crow_93.html) downloaded 30 March 2005.

What actions does Army administration need to take in order to facilitate servant leadership? Here are some of the important ones:

- Develop non-career-oriented leadership models.
- Dismantle as many forms of officer elitism as possible.
- Continue to find ways to expand participatory decision-making.⁵¹

I wonder why these have been omitted from the 2008 edition?

Personally, I wish that John Gowans had bitten the bullet offered by the Commission on Officership and abolished the two-tier system. It would have mitigated an injustice and encouraged the variety of options of vocational service available. I would have all leaders in full-time paid employment called officers; the soldiers' covenant would suffice for all. Appointments could be by application like any other job and be held under employment contract rather than the anomalous "employed by God" fiction we cling to – a relic from a Christendom we no longer inhabit. I would drop this claim to ordination and forget about whether or not we're as important as anyone else. Who gives a toss anyway? We already had the respect of anyone worth consulting without having to play clergy to get it.

I believe structural change is essential but none of us is in a position to make it, and you know it's not going to happen. In fact the whole paragraph quoted has been deleted from the new edition of *Servants Together*. Perhaps none of the changes suggested might have made any difference anyway. That leaves our *attitudes*. The 2002 text of *Servants Together* made one other suggestion, also now deleted in the new edition:

- Teach leaders to be servants by modelling it.⁵²

The mantra today is, "Servant Leadership". Too often, that's an oxymoron. Servant is as servant does. This is the only suggestion most of us can aspire to implement, but it is also the most important: to model servant-hood. And where opportunity affords, to name and challenge its antithesis, its shadow, which is the abuse of power.

To that I can only add four texts that I would commend to all of us to bind on our foreheads and get daily on our knees until they become part of our DNA:

- "That is the way the rulers of the nations act – *Don't be like them!*" (Matthew 20:25)
- "Wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you." (John 13:14)
- "The friend of the bridegroom rejoices at the bridegroom's voice... He must increase and I must decrease." (John 3:29) ("It's *not* all about *me!*")
- "Be nice to people on your way up – you may meet them again on your way back down."
(Lt Colonel Lawrence Weggery)

⁵¹ *Servants Together* (2002), p. 121.

⁵² *Servants Together* (2002), p. 121.